

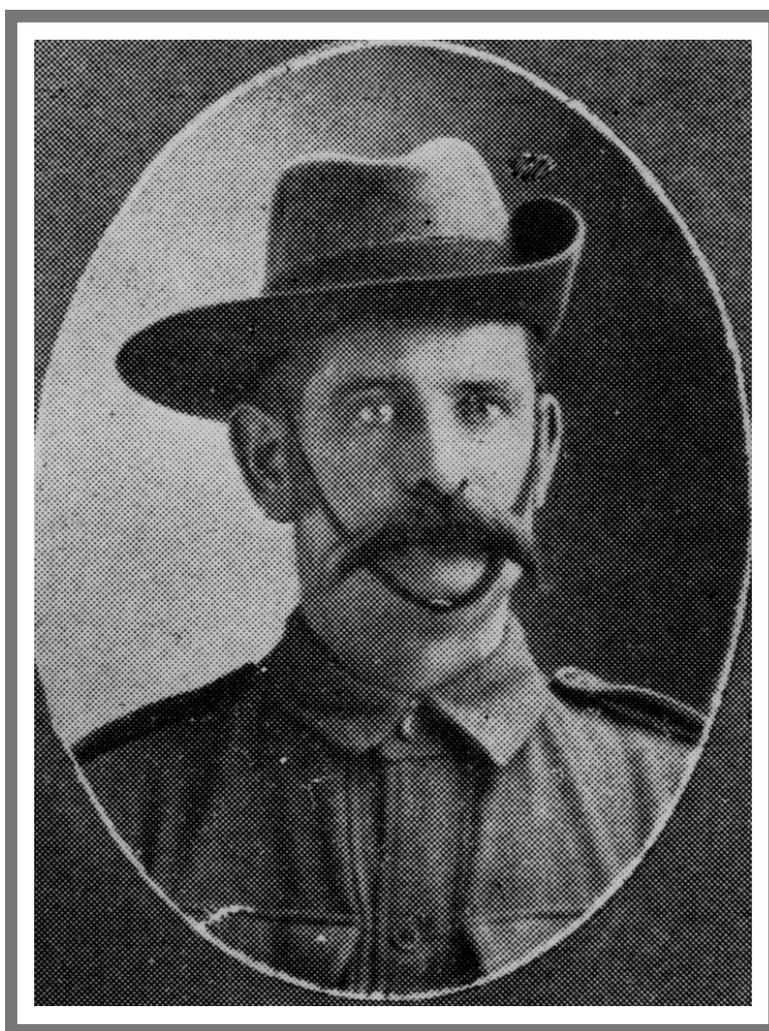
Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 84

RICHARD TANNER

1870 - 1916



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Private Richard Tanner

Richard Tanner was born in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton on 11 August 1870, son of Richard Middleton Tanner, a storeman, and Margaret née Bell. After the death in Melbourne of his father when Richard was only nine years old, Richard's mother and brothers moved to Brisbane. His mother died there in 1901 and his brothers, William and John married there, had families and remained in Brisbane.

On 5 August 1898 at the age of 28 years, Richard also married. His wedding to Margaret Glass McCaul took place at Redcliffe. Their only daughter, Margaret Evelyn was born the following year and their only son, Richard Athol was born in 1908.

It seems Richard did not find permanent employment. In 1903 he was a labourer while living at West End, Brisbane. The family's addresses in 1908 were at the Darling Downs town of Dalveen where they lived on properties known as Strathgarve and Braeside where Margaret was engaged in domestic duties but no occupation was recorded for Richard. In 1913 Richard Tanner was listed as a fruiterer in Marshall Street, Goondiwindi. When he enlisted however in the Australian Imperial Force in Brisbane on 9 July 1915, Richard Tanner had served over the previous three years in the Permanent Artillery. His trade on his application for enlistment was caterer. Richard Tanner's attestation paper shows he was 44 years and 10 months old when he enlisted. His next-of-kin was his wife Margaret then living at Goondiwindi and his religious denomination was Presbyterian.¹

1. Richard Tanner's name is listed on the Wharf Street Congregational Church Roll of Honour.

Allotted regimental number 430, he was appointed to B Company, 31st Battalion at Broadmeadows on 11 October and his unit embarked from Melbourne on His Majesty's Australian Transport *Wandilla* on 9 November 1915. During training in Egypt Private Tanner was fined two shillings and sixpence for drunkenness at Tel-el-Kebir.¹ With troops of the newly raised 5th Australian Division, Private Richard Tanner proceeded from Alexandria to France via Marseilles in June 1916, destined for the Western Front. He was sick in hospital with gastro enteritis from 4 July to 13 July when he was discharged to join his unit immediately. The 31st Battalion fought its first major battle at Fromelles on 19 July 1916, having only entered the front-line trenches three days previously. The attack was a disastrous introduction to battle for the 31st - it suffered 572 casualties, over half its strength, and Private Richard Tanner was killed in action on that day.

Due to the confusion of the battle, Richard Tanner's fate was not officially determined for some months. He was listed as 'wounded and missing' at first. One soldier thought his friend Dick Tanner might have been imprisoned in Germany. Another said he had heard Dick Tanner had been sent home to England wounded. Another comrade supplied a statement to a Red Cross official who communicated it to Mrs Tanner who having left Goondiwindi during 1917 was then residing at Spring Hill, Brisbane.

It said, "I knew him well, he was a Queenslander and I know his number 430. We were at Fleurbaix."

1. Tel-el-Kebir is 110 km north-north-east of Cairo and 75 kilometres south of Port Said on the edge of the Egyptian desert. It was the site for a training camp for AIF troops during the Great War.

“We held the trenches for 14 hours and we were then bombed out. I saw him killed by rifle fire. This was in the 2nd German line. He was shot just as we were getting out of the trench.”

The informant was Private T McBryde then stationed at 1 Convalescent Camp, Boulogne. Someone noted below Private McBryde’s words, “Informant gave his number correctly unaided.” Mrs Tanner sent this information by letter to the Officer-in-charge, Base Records at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne but the Officer-in-charge was not prepared to verify it till original documents had been examined.

Mrs Margaret Tanner made repeated requests for an official statement concerning her late husband’s death. In November 1917, some sixteen months after the casualty, she wrote again, this time from Redcliffe, “I wrote you asking for a certificate of death for 430 Pte Richard Tanner, 31st Battalion reported wounded and missing – since reported killed in action 19 July 1916. Can you not give me the certificate – as I wish to put in my claim for his insurance – the A.M.P. Insurance Co. gave me all the papers which I have duly had filled in and signed – and they are now writing to know why the claim is not put in. It is very hard as I am unable to start a business as I have only the pension – for myself and one child. My daughter I get nothing for as she is over age. Kindly let me know at your earliest if you can assist me in this matter.

Yours faithfully,
M. G. Tanner”¹

For Richard Tanner’s widow, Mrs Margaret Glass Tanner and her son Richard the way was difficult.

¹Mrs Margaret Glass Tanner, Redcliffe to O/C, Base Records, Melbourne, letter dated 16 November 1917

While dealing with the grief of her loss, Mrs Tanner was committed for trial on a charge of arson in connection with a fire in October 1916 which destroyed the Central Hotel and the Commonwealth building in Goodiwindi. Months later, she was found not guilty and dismissed. In 1934 Mrs Tanner was a café proprietor at The Esplanade, Manly and Richard Athol, her son, was a mechanic at the same address. They later lived at Redcliffe, Samford and Millaa Millaa. Mrs Tanner died in 1957.

Richard Tanner is remembered with honour at VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial where 400 unknown Australian soldiers killed in the Battle of Fromelles were re-buried. It is situated about two kilometres north-west of Fromelles, the only large exclusively Australian cemetery in France.

The photograph was taken by the writer while visiting the cemetery on 1 July 2015.



References

- Bean, CEW, *Anzac to Amiens*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 2014
- Pederson, Peter, *Anzacs on the Western Front*, Wiley, Milton, 2012
- Queensland Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Victorian Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Australian Electoral Rolls, 1903 to 1954
- National Archives of Australia, military records
- Australian War Memorial
 - Commonwealth War Graves Commission
 - Roll of Honour
- Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 1917
- The Telegraph*, Brisbane, 25 October 1901
- Balonne Beacon*, St George, 20 September 1917

Ancestry on line, family details

**In Memory of
Private RICHARD TANNER**

**430, 31st Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F.
who died age 45
on 19 July 1916**

**Son of Richard and Margaret Tanner (nee Bell); husband of
Margaret G. Tanner, of Redcliffe, Queensland.**

Native of Carlton, Victoria.

Remembered with honour

**V.C. CORNER AUSTRALIAN CEMETERY MEMORIAL,
FROMELLES**





Lest we forget